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Honorable Co-chairs, Mary Daugherty Abrams, Jonathan Steinberg
Bipartisan members of the Public Health Committee
Connecticut General Assembly: Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106
Public Hearing Testimony: phtestimony@cga.ct.gov

March 25, 2022

Regarding: *Testimony in support of HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis & Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention*

Position: As a doctorate-prepared nurse, a health care clinician for 53 years, and as a Nationally Board Certified Public Health Practitioner (NBPHE) working in the field since 2002, I stand in support of **declaring gun violence to be a public health crisis in Connecticut**. I also support Connecticut establishing and adequately funding (\$5 million annually) an ***Office of Gun Violence Prevention*** to address this public health crisis that is taking the lives of men, women and children in Connecticut on a daily basis.

Although I sit on many Boards, councils and committees, today I am speaking solely on my own behalf. I rise before you today to urge you to support and pass **HB 5397**. As our daily news reports demonstrate, no community in Connecticut is immune to gun violence. It is at epidemic levels in Connecticut & elsewhere in this country! We see its ramifications on television, in the news media, and for many of our children and adults, right in our own neighborhoods and homes. In 2021, gun homicides in Connecticut were at their highest level in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018. We are racing in the wrong direction!

My professional bona fides include that I am a doctorate-prepared healthcare professional with extensive work in public health, in med-surg clinical practice, in psychiatric care, as well as in public health advocacy in the broad areas of prevention. I have a special interest in gun violence because I was a childhood victim in the form of secondary trauma when I was just a first grade student. My father was shot in my home when I was 6 years old. Despite this having occurred decades ago, when shootings were not a multiple times a day occurrence, it has had a profound and lasting impact on me and it shaped my life. I can still visualize the handprints of blood all over the wall where my father held on trying to close the door to his children's bedroom. I can still see and feel the bullet hole in the window sill into which I would stick my finger. I was fascinated by his bullet wound scars, two in and two out, and I remember the reporters and photographers who swarmed our home.

Hemingway stated in *A Farewell to Arms*, “The world breaks everyone, and afterwards many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break it kills.” I was one of the fortunate ones. I became strong in the broken places. Far too many of children and young adults face gun violence not once in their lives, but day after day. Some of them get broken and stay broken. We do not all get to share the same benefits in life, even if we live in the same communities. The social determinants of health that help give us resilience are not equally available to all of us.

Some of you, but not all, may be aware of the concept of early childhood trauma and the havoc this can wreak on people throughout their life. Gun violence leaves anyone who witnesses it feeling unsafe. Its loud, its bloody, and its frightening; but gun violence has a broad ripple effect. It doesn’t impact just the immediate victim and their loved ones. Rather it affects all those who see, hear, or read about it, and then feel unsafe. It shapes how we see our world. How sad is it that active shooter drills have to occur in our children’s schools and that 1st graders can tell you all about them? How tragic is it that a child or an adult can be shot in their own home or bed by a shooting going on outside their home? How devastating is it that a teenager can go to a party and never return home because of gun violence? Recognizing gun violence for the epidemic it has become is a problem whose solution is way overdue. Creating an *Office of Gun Violence Prevention* would offer at least the potential that some changes with teeth to them might occur. After Sandy Hook over 200 laws were enacted, yet we see gun violence and mass shootings virtually every day. If the mass execution of 20 innocent 6 & 7-year-old babies in Sandy Hook (2012) did not spur effective action here in Connecticut, & it did not, something is morally wrong with either us or our system. With each new shooting, we say "something must be done", but something effective rarely is.

Establishing a *CT Office of Gun Violence Prevention* could be the first significant step in our moving forward. It could be a bi-partisan effort. Controlling gun violence does not equate to eliminating Second Amendment rights. I beg you to take this first step to begin to change our system. System change requires changing how we think about something. Most people will never see the catastrophic nature of what gun violence does to a human body; but as a healthcare provider, I have. Anyone who’s been to war has. We sanitize it, we blank out the horror, & we issue warnings that what you will NOT see on TV or in photos could be traumatizing. People need to know that victims like those mutilated children were, in some cases, beyond recognition by their own parents. Gun violence is horrific.

In conclusion, I am asking that you support and pass *HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis & Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention*. A public health crisis must be named & must be acted upon. It’s important that the full *CT General Assembly* recognize the severity & urgency of this situation by declaring gun violence a public health crisis, and that this crisis must be addressed by creating & funding an *Office of Gun Violence Prevention* with a state-level grant-making authority whose focus

would be on supporting community-based prevention, intervention, & after-care programs to reduce street-level gun violence.

HB-5397 calls for an appropriation of \$5 million to fund grant-making & dedicated staff in the *Department of Public Health*. It's a modest investment considering the magnitude of the crisis, & the estimated \$90 million annual cost to taxpayers of gun violence in Connecticut. We can no longer afford to wait. People are being shot & killed nearly every day in CT. Governors & state legislatures around the country are advancing initiatives like this; please add Connecticut to the list.

Respectfully submitted,

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